AN EXPOSITION OF THE GLORY OF THE DIVINE MOTHER, SRI CHANDIKA

Indian Philosophical Congress (38th Session, Madras 64)
Endowment Lectures 1973-74.

by
Dr S. S. RAGHAVACHAR

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S. S. RAGHAVACHAR

INTRODUCTION

It is a pleasure for me to pay homage to a great scripture devoted to the exposition of the glory of the Divine Mother, Sri Chandika. It is one of the fundamental scriptures in the field and is the object of special devotion in Bengal and the Divine Mother Sri Ramakrishna worshipped was conceived in the frame of reference set up by the work. It is variously named, Durga Saptasati, Devi Mahatmya, and Sri Chandi. The work has about seven important commentaries in Sanskrit. But the philosophy of the work has not entered into the main stream of current reconstructions of Indian philosophy and something like a philosophical study of the work can be of value.

The work is regarded with great reverence bordering on awe, and untold occult virtues are attributed to it and to worship incorporating it as a part of the rituals of worship. It is a devotional classic and has fostered and promoted in a distinctive and systematic fashion the worship of Chandika in the spirit of highest devotion. The Bhakti promulgated in the work has entered into the powerful Bhakti movement dedicated to Devi. Wherever Devi worship prevails, whether in Rajastan or Maharashtra, in Karnataka or Kerala, in the Maths of the great Sankaracharyas moving devotion is offered to the deity in the idiom of this Sacred poetry. In Bengal, it is needless to add, it has inspired religion in practice and exalted religious poetry such as that of Rāmaprasād and Kamalā Kānta. Thus the text has figured as a fountainhead of Sathwic Occultism and pure Bhakti.

But these aspects of the work should not be allowed to eclipse its philosophical significance. It contains a deep philosophical substance and its high valuation in the religious sphere is undoubtedly due to this philosophical core also. Its occult power and devotional height are directly facilitated by the lofty vision of reality it embodies. To elucidate this vision somewhat falls within the field of Indian philosophy conceived on proper lines. There is also the charm of freshness in as much as it is comparatively unexplored in the spirit of Vedānta. The heavy traditional commentaries are largely dominated by the tantric and mantric motivations. It is worth while treating the work in the manner in which the prasthānatraya is treated by the great Acharyas.

There is an initial handicap in this venture. The Chandī consists of stories depicting the glory of the Divine Mother and certain hymns addressed to her. It is easy to follow the philosophical thought of the hymns. But the stories are mythological in character like the stories in the purāṇas in general. But they are not pure mythology, if such a thing is conceivable. They are poetic and vivid representations of metaphysical ideas. As Swami Vivekananda said "Behind these ancient mythologies are nuggets of truth, and often, behind the fine, polished phrases of the moderns, is arrant trash". (Jñāna-Yoga, page-26). The interesting peculiarity of the greater mythologies is that the propositions which they advance through the stories are such that they are identical with what the stories mean if taken as literal, historical truth. Thanks to psychologists like Jung, we are getting accustomed to see in mythologies profounder revelations of the spirit of a civilization than in its bald and prosaic professions of credo. It is often the case that plastic fiction can be a better vehicle of truth than the hardened and limited facts of so-called history and science. Plato did well in casting his greatest intuitions into his celebrated myths. Our master-writers of the puranas such as the Bhāgavatam and the Chandī are experts in these subtleties of exposition and their stories carry their hidden imports in unmistakable suggestiveness and the poetic vehicle converts the austere truth into vibrant beauty.

Our theme, the Chandī, requires a specific procedure of study. Accordingly, it is necessary to form an adequate idea of the narrative frame-work. The narratives are brimming with points of spiritual

importance. It is good to set in relief this frame-work with brief and necessary comments to bring out the full volume of its purport. There are four major hymns, all occurring at crucial points, which set forth the philosophy of the work in the context of devotion offered to the supreme Mother. These hymns have to be carefully analysed and the elements of philosophical weight in them are to be duly distinguished. After these two divisions of study, the major step of gathering the philosophical ideas must be taken and the fundamental philosophy of the work must be articulated; that which inspires it at the base, as it were, and forms its final and crowning message.

II

The Narrative Frame-work

(a) There was a great ruler by name Suratha belonging to the dynasty of Chaitra. He was a mighty and good emperor. In a battle with enemies called Kolavi Dhvamsins, though his force outnumbered theirs, he was defeated. He returned to his capital. He could not reestablish himself or reorganise his forces for avenging the defeat. His enemies gradually penetrated to his capital and his own officers in authority gradually went over to their side. Thus undone, he left the kingdom and found a friendly shelter and hospitality in the peaceful hermitage of the sage, Medhas. The latter was a great Sage and in his holy āśram, the ferocious beasts of the forest lived in perfect non-violence. Though settled in the holy place, the king was passing through a perpectual agony of thought concerning his overthrow and the fate he feared had overtaken his beloved kingdom. In the mean while, a merchant, named Samādhi, joined the hermitage in a similar plight of sorrow and downfall. He had been a prosperous man, but his wife and sons had driven him out after appropriating all his wealth. He too dwelt in the Āśram lost in sorrow and thought about the welfare of his family. May be, the names Medhas, Suratha and Samādhi are not insignificant. The symbolism is rather transparent as we shall see.

The two visitors exchanged thoughts and understood each other well. They planned an interview with the sage and in all humility and respect they sought enlightenment from him on their common problem. Their situation is somewhat philosophised and they seek not boons of relief or restoration but a clear light on their problem.

The problem is well stated by the king. He asks, "How is it that both of us, dispossessed and rejected, and knowing our position well, still suffer from attachment to what has hurt us so deeply? How is it that even men of understanding, such as ourselves, are subject to delusive attachments?" This is a perennial spiritual problem, that of man knowing the higher and being engressed in the lower values. There is knowledge but no wisdom. In the words of our text, there is Jñāna but no Viveka. The problem is not far removed from the question of Arjuna"

केन प्रयुक्तोऽयं पापं चरति पुरुषः ।
अनिच्छन्नपि वार्ष्णेय बलादिव नियोजितः ॥ (Gita, 2-35)

The Sage propounds a great answer. Knowledge of a sort is there in man. The understanding of the envirnment through the senses is there as a matter of nature. In this man is more or less in the condition of animals. They too have sensory equipment and make the necessary assessments of their external situation. One is reminded of a similar observation by Śaṅkara in his Adhyāsa bhāshya. But this animal understanding is a poor thing. It cannot prevent or eliminate bondage to delusive hankerings. A man may be awake to the world but may be in the deepest slumber concerning the 'truth' that could make him, 'free' This root anamoly of the human situation, it is proclaimed by the sage, is due to the functioning of Mahāmāyā, the Yoga Nidra of Vishnu. It is she, the Mahāmāyā, that brings about the delusion of even the enlightened ones by her prowess and it is she that sets up this world of animate and inanimate beings. She is the absolute power; and she casts creatures into captivity and if she is gracious, she can emancipate them into final beatitude. In brief and pregnant words, the Sage propounds the basic teaching of the work. We may note briefly the meaning of the concept of Mahāmāyā inaugurated here for purposes of a clear understanding of what follows. Mahāmāyā is an absolute power, the supreme force behind all creation. It is force that can both crush and bless. This power is a dimension, an aspect, an attribute of Vishṇu. It belongs to Viṣhṇu in the truly metaphysical sense of 'belonging.' The Mahāmāyā, is not the psychological process of running into an illusion; it is not a bhrānti, however much it may be the matrix of illusions. It is an ontological verity, wrought into the fundamental being of ultimate

reality. This power, the Mahāmāyā, is a person, a deity, a Goddess, exercising sovereignty and aboundings in mercy. The personalistic imagination is very strong in the Chandī; the wrath of the deity emanates as a person, and even her outbreathings in the course of a fight solidify into warriors replenishing her army. Thus the Mahāmāyā is an ultimate and sovereign power of Viṣṇu, is of the nature of an omipotent divine personality and is the cause of all that happens to the creatures, It is she that accounts for the presence of delusions even in those that are enlightened in the normal human sense.

The disciples, — we can speak of them as such here-after-Suratha and Samādhi set aside for the time being their personal griefs and seek fuller enlightement about the Goddess, Mahāmāyā. The intellectual quest is afoot. The sage tells the first charita, heroic doing, of Mahāmāyā.

Though Mahāmāyā is eternal and immutable, she manifests herself in different incarnations for the protection of the righteous and it is manifestation such as these that is spoken of as her birth in the world. In the great antiquity at the end of a Kalpa when deluge waters had covered the world and Lord Viṣṇu resorted to the slumber of Yoga and had withdrawn into himself, two demons Madhu and Kaithabha, who themselves were born of the secretions of his ears, had mounted an attack on Brahma and were bent upon destroying him. Yoga-Nidra is an aspect of Mahāmāyā and it is due to her enveloping Vishnu, by his own choice obviously, that Brahma was exposed to the demons. Brahma represents the Vedas and the attack was certainly directed at their destruction. When driven to his last resource, as it were, Brahma addressed a hymn of praise to her. In his prayers he appealed to her to arouse Viṣṇu to his cosmic concern and also to delude the two demons appropriately. Then the Goddess Yoga Nidra, the tamasic aspect of Mahāmāya, withdraw from Viṣṇu. The latter arose and went into battle at once with the demons. The battle was ferrific. There is a fine feature in the Chandī in the treatment of battles. They are made tremendously terrific but move rapidly to the climax. The enemies are annihilated in graceful quickness after putting forth their frightful might. In this, the work resembles some what the battles of Hanuman in the Sundarakāṇḍa of Vālmīki. In the present fight, the two demons are impressed by Viṣṇu's prowess and

in the generosity of foolish pride and under the influence of Maya, promise to give a boon to Viṣṇu as a mark of their appreciation. If this is surprising, Viṣṇu's choice of the boon is more so. He asked the boon that they might die at his hands. They give the boon but specify a condition that appears to them to be impossible of fulfilment. They want him to kill them in a waterless spot. Viṣṇu seizes them and puts them in his lap and kills them. The danger to Brahma and the Vedas he contains is eliminated completely. The moral of the story is significant. Knowledge concerning divine verities is obtainable only through divine grace and the grace is to be obtained through the propitiation of Mahāmāyā. She withdraws from the supreme being and thus renders his grace active and she blunts the forces destructive of that knowledge. One is almost tempted to interpret Brahma as representing sattva and Madhu and Kaithavha as representing Rajas and Tamas. But our text does not explicate this symbolism. It is also to be noted that the active protective concern of Vishnu becomes operative not because of this Māyā but only after Maya leaves him. In other words, he is self-absorbed and practically acosmic when enveloped by Maya and it is only when Maya leaves him that he regains cosmic activity. The self-destructive pride of the demons is due to the delusion that Māyā spreads over them. Evil perishes by a law of self-destruction which is executed by Mahāmāya. The demons too arise from the ultimate Divine principle. There is no dualism of the powers of right and wrong in the scheme of reality in itself.

(B) The second charitra of Mahāmāyā is less complicated in structure and is truly magnificent. Here the goddess does not indirectly aid the destruction of evil but constitutes the principal agent. There was a mighty demon in ancient times called Mahiṣā-Sura and his name and his actual form as represented in the story imply that he was a buffalo-demon. This could only mean that he was massive and had beastly strength. It is so easy to see in him the personification of Rajas and Tamas. There was a prolonged battle between him and the gods and he was absolutely victorious. He established himself as the emperor of the universe.

It is appropriate at this stage to comment a little on this division of demons and gods. The Gītā offers unfailing guidance on the point. The demons are beings governed by the philosophy of brute material

force and the gods are beings that have attained positions of authority in the scheme of the world through good deeds so that they may maintain the moral order on which it is founded. This is no division of souls by virtue of anything innate in them. This is a contingent division of beings on grounds of their antecedents, present deeds and their dispositions. The gods are tools of Dharma while the demon are antogonistic to it. The composition of the two groups varies but the division remains. The ethical dualism is fundamental though there is no metaphysical dualism. The demons under the leadership of Mahisha consolidated themselves and deposed all the gods. They took over the functions of them and utilised their powers for goals other than divine and Dharmic. Naturally the gods gathered and under the leadership of Brahma, approached Viṣṇu and Siva. They submitted to these ostensibly supreme gods their plight and begged for rescue and restoration. The good under subjection to evil seeks the divine for the restablishment of the moral order. The two supreme gods became intensely enraged and their rage radiated from them and took the shape of blazing powers. Following them the powers of all the other lesser gods also externalised themselves. All these powers got integrated and the outcome was the formation of a resplendent Goddess, filling the three worlds with her luminous presence. The powers of the several gods went into the formation of the several parts of that Divinity. The gods were overjoyed at the cumulative concretization of their powers and they hastened to furnish the goddess with their own destructive weapons and the decorations they could supply. The radiant power so formed, equipped and adorned, thundered forth terrific battle shouts. This challenging war-cry echoed throughout the universe. All the worlds were frightened, the oceans trembled, the earth shook and the mountains were set in motion. The gods shouted for her victory and the sages sang her praise. The demons mobilized themselves and sprang forth for war. Mahiṣa himself arrived within sight of the Goddess, under whose foot the earth was bending, whose crown was shining in the heavens and whose prowess was causing havoc even in the nether worlds. With a thousand arms. she was wielding countless weapons. Her battle was full of sound and fury and she filled effectively all space. Battle started in full swing. It may be remarked that for briskness of narration and for conveying the fierceness of the battles involving all the weapons of warfare, our work is superb. There is a vividness that is truly terrifying. The great heroes on Mahiṣa's side,

Chikshura, Chamara, Udagra, Mahahanu, Asiloma, Bashkala, Vidala, fought bravely and mightily. Horses, elephants, chariots were thrown into action in huge number. The goddess and Her vehicle, the lion, faced the mighty forces with amazing destructive power. The heroes doing wonders, fell one by one. Finally Mahiṣa took the fight into his own hands. His agility, skill and strength were equal to the occasion The account impresses us with the immensity of his prowess. He could take many forms, that of a giant of a man, a lion, an elephant that could overpower even a lion, and that of a he-buffalo. The last seems to have been his favourite from. He fought in all of them and the goddess struck him down in all of them. Finally he assumed the buffaloform for the second time. The goddess pressed him down by her foot on his neck and drank the martial wine; obviously she was using the drink also as a weapon as one of the gods had specifically provided her with it. While the demon was partly emerging into human form form the buffalo-form pinned down to the earth, the great Chandika severed his head with her great sward. He fell. There was an uproar of shocked grief and fright in the army of the demons and the gods got exhuberantly delighted. The celestials sang and danced in joy. The gods and great sages approached the victorious Mother and gave themselves up to her adoration. Then follows a sublime hymn of thankful praise. The divine mother is graciously pleased by the exalted devotion of the divinities and bursts into further bountifulness. She demands of them to specify some further boon. They gratefully acknowledge the favours showered on them by this destruction of their great foe, Mahiṣa-Sura. As she insists on conferring a further boon, they pray that she may respond in future also to their devotion in the form of just remembrance and destroy whatever dangers and afflictions they may be subject to at the time. It is significant that nothing more than mere remembrance is named here as forming the core of devotion. This is the characteristic case and simplicity of devotion prescribed in the Chandi and this mercy of expectation is repeated in the work several times. The divine mother seems to await just Smarana-Bhakti and nothing more and on its arising, she swings into her saving operations. The gods pray further that whoever in future resorts to the Divine Mother by reciting the hymn they have just now sung, may receive her bountiful grace by way of all prosperity. The gods prayed thus for a large boon to themselves and a boon for

the world in general and Sri Chandika conferred them and withdrew Her manifestation from their wondering sight. She is truly Bhadra-Kāḷī, as the text calls her here, for She is auspicious and destructive. Her destructiveness follows from her redemptive graciousness. We move on now to the next Charitra of Śrī Chandikā.

(C) Two powerful demon-brothers Sumbha and Nishumbha with a powerful and huge following acquired mastery of the world order, deposed the gods as usual, took up their appointed functions and authority and established themselves as supreme rulers in the scheme of things. The morel government of the world was replaced by the Asuic rule.

The gods remembered the boon of the Divine Mother that she would instantly destroy their enemies and dangers whenever they offered the devotion of remembering her. Her very words of promise echoed in their aching hearts. They resorted to the lofty Himalayas and offered their prayers to the goddess, Viṣṇu-māyā. These prayers constitute the third major hymn in our text. As the hymn of prayers was being brought to a climax, Pārvatī, the divine daughter of Himavān, arrived on the scene in order to bathe in the sacred Gaṅgā. She asked the gods, rather in a surprisingly casual and unconcerned way as if they were not addressing her, as to what goddess they were praying to. From the sheath of the body of Pārvatī emerged Śivā, Mother Ambikā, and answered Pārvatī that She, Ambikā, was the object of their worship and they had come to her defeated and dispossessed by the demons, Sumbha and Nishumbha. On Ambikā coming out of her body, Pārvatī became the dark Kālī and Ambikā bearing the most charming form was sighted by Chanda and Muṇḍa, the servants of Sumbha and Nisumbha.

They returned to Sumbha and reported about the bewitching beauty of Ambikā. They also added that he, being the master of all the most precious things in the world, the treasured possessions of the deposed gods, was legitimately entitled to have this most precious of women. She was, they exclaimed, a Śtrī-Ratna, a jewel among women, fit to become his possession. Sumbha heard the report like Rāvaṇa but unlike Rāvaṇa adopted a rather straight method. He ordered his messenger, Sugrīva, to approach the lady and make the

proposal in a manner suited to winning her love. Sugrīva proceeded accordingly and expatiated upon the greatness of his master and his brother in glowing words. He proposed on behalf of Sumbha that she might accept him or his brother as her husband. Ambikā listened to the proposal in a charming way but regretted that the matter could not be settled so smoothly. Stupid as she was, she had taken a vow that she would accept as her lord only him who could over-power and defeat her in battle. Sugrīva reprimands her for the foolishness. No gods can stand in battle even against the followers of Sumbha. How could she, a mere woman, offer battle to the mighty Sumbha and Nisumbha? He says that if she does not voluntarily accept the proposal, she would be dragged to wedlock through force. She pleads her inability to break the vow and in consequence, prefers marriage by defeat and capture. She gently suggests that Sugrīva might hasten the prospects of this strange but honest marriage. Sugrīva returns to Sumbha and reports the stupid stipulation of Ambikā. On hearing this, the demon-king is indignant and issues war commands. The first hero to be commissioned to bring the erring damsel by force is the general, Dhumra-lochana.

There is a point in this manner of the commencement of the war. The Divine Mother plants in the heart of the demon sex-desire and infuriates him by frustrating it. That itself would have been sufficient provocation for violence. But the apparently perverse condition laid down by her traps him straightaway into utmost commitment to war. It is not that violence is simply perpetrated by him. It is actually demanded of him. If the condition was not there, perhaps there would have been scope for deception as in the case of Rāvaṇa. What destroys man ultimately are not the external enemies, but Kāma and Krodha. Kāma in this case calls for Krodha. Krodha arises here both by frustration of Kāma and the actual requirement that Kāma should be fulfilled only through it. Truly has Lord Krishna declared '

काम एष क्रोध एष रजोगुण समुद्भवः ।
महाशनो महापाप्मा विद्येये न मिह वैरिणं ॥ (Gita 3-37)

The seeds of the destruction of Sambha and Nishamba are well-sown.

The battle commences in full swing. An immense army of demons and divine beings get involved in it. All possible weapons of destru-

ction known to Indian antiquity are mentioned and they are used effectively by both sides. Animals, the lion of the Goddess, elephants, horses and chariots are thrown into the front in merciless and Volcanic action. The noise of the battle and war-laughter rise in shattering volume and pitch and seem to break up the universe. The earth is flooded with the blood of the slaughtered. The picture is that of unspeakable fierceness. Dhumra-lochana though a great warrior offers not much trouble. He is despatched in no time. Sumbha orders Chanda and Muṇḍa to the bloody task of attack and capture. On seeing them, the peaceful and captivating Ambikā flew into a rage. Her rage made her black and from her face twisted and burning with anger emerged Kāḷī, terrifying in all aspects, emaciated and hungry. She started devouring the hostile forces in devastating fury and power in lightening speed. She spared nothing, not even the chariots and the inanimate equipment of the enemy in her all-devouring ferocity. Chanda and afterwords Muṇḍa did their heroic best to arrest the ruination she wrought. But they were no match. She cut out their heads and offered them as an oblation to Ambikā and predicted the completion of the bloody sacrifice by Ambikā herself, slaughtering Sumbha and Nishumbha. The sweet Chandikā declared that Kāḷī would be known thenceforth as Chāmuṇḍā.

The next stage of the battle is elaborately introduced. Sumbha orders a march of his entire army. The Devī, her lion and Kāḷī greeted the advancing mass of demons with a terrific battleroar. They were also encircled by the fierce formation of the enemy. At this point, the gods planning for a decisive battle and anxious for complete victory started augumenting the Devī's might. From each important god emerged a female replica of him, bearing his individual form, wearing his characteristic weapons, riding his special vehicle and possessed of his prowess. These were the śaktis of the gods. There were śaktis of Śiva, Viṣṇu, Brahma, Varāha, Skanda, Narasimha and Indra. They joined Chandikā and the united group worked a tremendous destruction of the ememies. Śiva encouraged Chandikā and asked her to annihilate the demons for love of him. He, in his turn, was sent as a messenger to the demons with the proposal that the demons might return the three worlds to the gods and establish themselves in pātāla, the nether world. This only infuriated the demons further and war mounted up. The struggle seemed to be swinging in favour of Chan-

dikā. At this stage, a demon, named Rakta-bīga, entered the centre of the battle. There was a special magical potency in himself is blood was shed in battle, each drop would itself become a demon-warrior, equal in strength to him. When he was attacked by the goddesses, there was a generation of a bewildering mass of heroic demons. The number of the new warriors swelled enormously and practically filled the whole field of battle. This put the gods and goddesses into dismay. Chandikā asked Kāḷī to spread her mouth widely and catch quickly all the drops of blood that the demon was shedding in battle and all the demons that might arise out of them. Kāḷī was just the right goddess for it. She caught every drop of blood and every demon that arose out of the drops that had touched the ground. She was equal to the feed. Gradually Rakta-bīga lost all his blood and succumbed to the blows delivered by Chandikā. The gods rejoiced over his fall and the goddesses danced in glee.

The point of this story is that evil rarely perishes in its entirety. The very assault on it generates evil offspring in abandance. Evil should be so destroyed that the very destruction does not cause generation of fresh evils.

Now the final phase of the war is on. Nishumbha fights resolutely and mightily. His courage, prowess and skill in war are marvellous and he almost equals his elder brother. He is ably supported by him. Eventually after a worthy combat he falls, pierced at the heart by the spear and beheaded by the sword, of Chandikā. Sumbha is the surviving warrior of might. He surpassed all others in every martial feat and was their natural leader. He accuses her of false strength. She, he says, fights with the power of other goddesses but takes pride in victories not due to her own doings. Chandikā repels the accusation and withdraws all the goddesses into her own being. They, she maintains, are her own several manifestations and in reality she is one without a second. Then the single combat is on ; between him, the mightiest of the demons and Chandikā, the Divine Mother, one without a second. They fight in every way and on earth and air. The fight causes fright to the whole world and amazes even the all-knowing sages. At the crescendo of the combat, the Devī arrests the enemy rushing towards her with clenched fist and spears him at the

chest. He falls shaking the whole earth with all its oceans and mountains. The evil one perishes.

Peace and joy once again returned to the world. The very elements and the gods over-flowed with gladness. There was unprecedented rapture everywhere. The gods re–assemble and make their grateful obeisance to the Divine Mother. They hymn their adoration to Her in sublime words. This hymn is the fourth and the final one in the scripture.

The Goddess is gracious and offers another boon to them and to the world at large. They ask for the destruction of all afflictions in the all the three worlds and for the destruction of their own possible enemies in future. She grants the boon. She lists her future incarnations and protective manifestations. She is to kill Sumbha and Nishumbha in another birth, eat up the demons called Vaiprachittas. In a period of great drought and famine She is to cast her thousand eyes of grace on the sages and to grow sustaining vegetables on her own body till rains come, become Durgā by killing a demon called Durgama, become Bhīma Devī and devour demons at the Himalayas for protecting the sages and destroy the demon called Aruna in the form of countless bees. Thus she will continue to exercise her maternal care for all eternity. She concludes by commending the holy narration in the text and extols its marvellous powers. She specially recommends the chanting of the great hymns it contains.

After concluding this glorious account of Chandikā, the sage Medhas advises Suratha and Samādhi to take to devotion to Her. They do so in earnest austerity. They worship her, sing her praises and even make offerings sprinkled with their own blood. The king prays for his restoration to the Kingdom and also for kingship in future births. The merchant is a higher type of devotee and he prays initially for the vision of the Mother and on Her gracious self-revelation begs for emancipating wisdom. They are granted their respective prayers. Such is the bare skeleton of the Devī Māhātmya stripped of its high poetry of vivid and picturesque description and quick movement of stirring narration. Even in it prosaic kernel the terror and sublimity of the divine presence stand out prominently. The paradox of the mother aspect of god-head issuing in devastating might is conveyed in telling depth.

III – *Analysis of the four hymns.*

(A) The first major hymn to Mahāmāyā is from Brahma, in his hour of peril at the hands of Madhu and Kaiṭhabha. To him the Divine Mother constitutes the sacred formulas Svaha and Svadha used in the Vedic worship of the gods and manes and is the power behind their efficacy. Hers is the force contained in all the mystic potency of the sacrifices. She is immutable and can lead to the final bliss of liberation. She takes the form of 'Aum', the most sacred praṇava. She functions as its three constituents and also the inarticulate culmination of it. She is the great Mother, dwelling in the supreme mantra of Sāvitrī. The predominant thought here is that She constitutes the very body of the Vedas.

Her cosmic form is no less significant. She creates, sustains and dissolves the universe. She is the very act of creation, the very being of beings in their state of actuality and is the process of destruction at their destruction.

In spiritual life she visits as illumination and in bondage and delusion, She is the power of darkness. She is the primordial prakriti functioning through the guṇas and brings about the slumber of souls thereby. All that is graceful and grand in creation is her self-disclosure. She is beauty supreme and the absolute sovereign. She bears weapons in her concrete person for purposs of protecting the devotees and as a mark of her readiness to do so. whatever is or is not, in manifest actuality, whatever is good or bad, has whatever potency it has, through her. In fact she constitutes all potency. How can she be fittingly praised?

Even He, who creates, protects and swallows up the universe, is induced to obliviousness by Her. Who can really pay Her adequate tributes? Even Viṣṇu, Śiva and Brahma resort to incarnations under Her power. Who can command the resources for the full appreciation of Her majesty?

Four propositions stand out prominently in this hymn.

(1) Mahāmāyā forms the Very body of the sacred illumination constituting the Vedas.

(2) She is the source of delusion and bondage, on the one hand, for the creatures and also of illumination and liberation for them.

(3) She is the primordial power, creating, sustainning and dissolving the worlds. Incidentally the gods usually associated with these cosmic functions are said to be under her sway.

(4) Within the created world, all powers of all beings spring from her and all that is good, true and beautiful in them and all forms of grandeur are Her self-disclosures. She is beauty supreme.

To her, we ought to resort in prayerful surrender in our trials and tribulations and She holds herself in gracious readiness to rescue and uplift us.

(B) The second major hymn rises from the grateful hearts of the gods, after the destruction of Mahiṣā-Sura. They are devoutly humble and are filled with the ecstacy of bhakti.

The Devī pervades the world with her inherent power and is herself the consolidated mass of the powers of all gods. No one, not even Viṣṇu, Bradma and Śiva can offer adequate praise to Her. She is the prosperity of the good and the privation of the unrighteous, the intellect of the sages, the faith of the pious and the decorum of the well-bred. May she protect the world and resolve upon the destruction of fear, sorrow and evil! How can Her beauty, greatness of prowess and marvellous deeds be praised fully? She is the cause of the whole cosmos and sustains the three primordial guṇas but is not touched by evil. Even the great gods cannot measure Her greatness. She is the support of all, this whole universe is a part of Hers, She is the unmanifested basal principle of nature.

The sacrifices gratify the gods if She is adored in them and the worship of the fathers reaches them if She is duly praised in it. She secures liberation to the austere sages and She is the highest wisdom of the wise ones. She is the three Vedas and also the science of worldly wisdom necessary for the conduct of the ordinary pursuits of life. She is the dispeller of even the greatest distress. She is the intelligence comprehending the essence of all the Śāstras and She is the Durgā,

taking creatures beyond the ocean of transmigration. She is Laxmī, the consort of Viṣṇu, and She is Gaurī, the consort of Śiva. It is a wonder that Mahiṣa-Sura could attack her, inspite of Her splendour of personality. How did he continue to live after beholding Her form of utmost frightfulness? She in her righteous indignation can wipe out entire dynasties, however big and powerful they may be. The case of Mahiṣa-Sura is an illustration thereof. If She is gracious, all the good things of life come to the devotee in unmeasured plenty. The law of Karma productive of good to therighteous is operated by her. It is infact she that confers the fruits of good works.

Durgā removes the fears of all who remember Her. She kindles the right understanding in those who remember Her in serenity. She dispels anxieties, grief and poverty. Who else is as tender-hearted as She, for bringing about all the hoppiness for all?

दुर्गे स्पृता हरसि भीतिमशेष जन्तोः
स्वस्थैः स्मृता मतिमतीव शुभां ददासि ।
दारिद्रयदुःख भयहारिणि का त्वदन्या
सर्वोपकार करणाय सदार्द्रचित्ता ॥

This tender-heartedness is not restricted towards the good only. When the demons are destroyed the rest of the world is no doubt saved. It is also a boon to the wicked demons, as other-wise they would protract their career of sin leading them to damnation. She could have killed them by her very ferocity of looks but She sustains them by Her beauty. She plans for them also in compasaion. It they were to die actually at Her hands, they would be purified by Her weapons. Destruction in this case is verily purification. She thus rewards the rightous, answers the prayers of the oppressed and sanctifies even the wicked. She subdues evil conduct, Her form is uniquelay blisseful to the beholders, Her prowess cuts down even the conquerors of the gods, and Her compassion extends to even to the antogonists. What parellel could there be for Her strength, Her form terrific to the foes and excessively captivating to the others? She is compassionate at heart but deadly in battle. Only in Her could opposite virtues co-exist. She is indeed the granter of boons in all the three worlds. These worlds are saved by the annihilation of the enemies and the enemies themselves are lifted heavenwords and the gods are freed from the fear of the demons.

Naturally the gods bow down to Her in complete adoration. They pray for continued protection, through Her forms terrific and forms charming.

The main ideas embedded in tho hymn may be summed up.

(1) The Devī is the all-pervading power and is the primordial foundation of things. Yet She transcends evil. Even the great gods find it impossible to grasp Her greatness.

(2) She is the glory that crowns rightous lives and is the deprivation to which the unrighteous are condemned. In fact She is the worker of the law of Karma.

(3) She is not only the power behind the Vedas, and the efficacy of Vedic rites; She is liberating knowledge also, as also secular science.

(4) She is beauty and compassionate grace.

(5) Her grace takes many forms. It brings about final liberation. It confers liberating knowledge. It rescues devotees omnipotently from fears, dangers and afflictions, if only they remember Her in the hour of distress. It confers untold blessings on the needy worshippers. Finally, it works out-herein lies the unique idea of the hymn-the sanctification of the wicked through the very process of their apparent annihilation.

(C) Thr third hymn is also from the gods and it is the form in which they worship and pray to the Divine Mother for relief from the almost complete over-throw they have sustained at the hands of Sumbha and Nishumbha. It is simple in philosophical content but excels in the poetic refrain of adoring salutation to the Divine Mother.

नमस्तस्यै नमस्तस्यै नमस्तस्यै नमो नम :

The mother is universally immanent. As the Gītā has it and as we have it in the earlier hymns also, the transcendent Mother descends to Her creation and discloses Her presence in all that is of significance, by way of power or goodness or beauty. She permeates the universe by Her radiant Being and reveals Herself in things and situations, both

good and bad, in so far as they have any speciality or importance. The focal points of revelation in the hymn confine themselves to the human aspect of creation. All that makes a difference to human beings is a radiation from the indwelling mother. She is Viṣṇu-Māyā, the inscrutable power of Viṣṇu. She is consciousness in beings. She is the intellect. She is even sleep, hunger and reflection. She is Śakti in all beings. She is desire, forgiveness, the generic attribute and birth and also the decorous sense of shame. She is peace and renunciation. She is faith, radiance, wealth, and even the occupation that men live by. She is memory, mercy, and contentment. The mother of every creature is she. She is illusion. She is the prevading force actuating the senses. She pervades the cosmos as the principle of sentience. To Her, say the gods, "we offer our obeisance again and again". In fact, each of these forms receives five obeisances. The spirit of the hymn is one of utter self-surrender to all the cosmic manifestations of the Deity.

(D) The final hymn records the acknowledgement of the great Mother's protective grace. She is truly the mother of all existence. She is the sovereign over all. She sustains all beings as the earth and nourishes them as water. She is the infinite power of Viṣṇu and, through Her, creatures are deluded. Again she is the cause of their salvation. She is the dispeller of the affliction of those who seek refuge at Her feet. All sciences are Her forms, all women are Her manifestations and She fills the entire universe. Such is Her greatness that there can be no praise of Her, by way of extolling Her. All praise becomes under-statement in Her case. She is all existence, and is the giver of heaven and even liberation. She is the intellect of all men. She is time, that overtake all creation. She is the very essence of auspiciousness of all that is auspicious. She is the refuge and the power of creation, maintenance and dissolution. She supports the three guṇas and abounds in excellences which are really guṇas. She is ever engaged in rescuing the humble and the afflicted who throw themselves on Her mercy. She is Brāhmanī, Maheśvarī, Koumarī, Vaiṣṇavī, Vārāhī, Nrisimhī, Indrānī, Śiva-duti, Chāmuṇḍā, Laxmī and Sarasvatī. In short, she is all the goddesses that figure in the fight against the demons. She is of the nature of all beings. She is the supreme sovereign over all and is the possessor of all powers. From Her, protection from all fear is sought. In all these stanzas of praise

and prayer, there is a refrain "नारायणि नमोस्तु ते ।" 'adoration to thee, Nārāyanī'. She is principally addressed as Nārāyanī. She cures all diseases and, if indignant, can destroy all objects of all desire. There is no peril to those who depend upon Her. In fact such devotees will offer refuge to others. Singlehanded she has destroyed all demons, hostile to Dharma, through a multitude of forms. She is the source of all knowledge and yet She runs the delusive process of transmigration. She is 'Visveśvarī' the sovereign of the universe, who protects it. She is 'Visvātmikā' the soul of the universe, who sustains it. She is 'Visveśa-vandya' worshipped by the lords of the worlds. They who are humbly devoted to Her become 'Visvāśraya' the supporters of the universe. The gods invoke the Mother's everlasting grace both on themselves and the entire world. The hymn is a fitting climax to the manysided bhakti of the gods. It is an ecstatic self-surrender to the Divine Mother, conceived in all Her infinity of powers, beauty, manifestations and compassionate grace. Perhaps, the following three verses represent the essence of the hymn. The Sri Ramakrishna order has displayed great discernmant in incorporating them in the daily prayers.

सर्वमंगळ मांगल्ये शिवे सर्वार्थसाधिके ।
शरण्ये त्र्यंबके गौरि नारायणि नमोस्तु ते ॥

She is the principle of auspiciousness.

सृष्टिस्थिति विनाशानां शक्तिभूते सनातनि ।
गुणाश्रये गुणमये नारायणि नमोस्तुते ॥

She is the eternal power expressing itself in the entire cosmis process.

शरणागत दीनार्त परित्राण परायणे ।
सर्वस्यार्तिं हरे देवि नारायणि नमौस्तुते ॥

She is the unfailing refuge for all beings who are virtually lost and She is wholly concerned in the redemption of all who come unto Her.

IV. The Philosophical Standpoint

(a) It is difficult to get out of the imaginative vision which the Chandī sets up, as is necessary for making detached philosophical

observations on it. A firm grasp of the fundamentals requires a certain phychic distante and release from the emotional submergence in the datum and also a certain nonengrossment in details. The peculiarity of our work is such that it envelops the student with the living reality of the all-permeating Mother. She rarely leaves the stage after once introduced in the text and althrough the movement of the narrative and passage of hymns, She takes possession of us in Her multifarious forms and activities. In Advaita there is the theory that the comprehension of the central mahāvākya 'Tattvamasi' produces a direct experience of the Absolute. Whether it is true or not in the case of Upaniṣadic pronouncements, it is certainly a fact in the case of the Chandī. The only other work which achieves this miracle of transmuting study into almost perceptual vision is perhaps Tulasi Das's Rāmāyana. Well may the Scripture declare that the Mother appears on the scene the moment she is remembered and the work as a whole produces a solid and sustained remembrance of Her, which the Chandogya upaniṣad would have described as Dhruvā Smriti.

It is rather a compassionate concession on the part of the work that the only spiritual exercise it prescribes and extols frequently is this remembrance of the Mother. Other forms of worship are just necessities of bhakti but are not necessities for realisation. The basic requirement is simple and easy of attainment. It is true that Suratha and Samādhi practised eleborate worship to the point of sprinkling the offerings to the Mother with their own blood. The commentator, Nāgoji Bhaṭṭa, who is otherwise no good commentator helps us in the context. He says that only the king who wanted secular boons from the Mother and not the elevated devotee, Samādhi, did so. He may be correct. Further it is after all the devotee's own blood that is offered as symbolic of self-oblation and no slaughter of other beings is envisaged as essential for the ritual. The later association of Durgā worship with animal sacrifices or even human sacrifice is a deviation and a fall from the standpoint of our scripture. It is also significant that the caste hierarchy is somewhat upset in the Chandī. The Kṣatriya is after lower puruṣārthas, while the Vaiśya rises definitely higher.

But devotion by way of devout remembrance is Just the pramāna for acquiring certainty of knowledge. With regard to the Mother it is

all that is necessary and sufficient. The knowledge so gained does not remain merely a subjective vision with every chance of being a hallucination. Our scripture propounds a principle of confirmation that transcends the internal perception. The Mother invoked in remembrance testifies to Her reality by accomplishing the redemption of the devotese from the danger, fear, affliction, delusion and sin for the sake of which he resorts to the devotion of remembrance. There is a transformation of the human situation from that of anguish and acepticism to that of triumphant purification, illumination and fulfilment. The reality of this uplift guarantees the authenticity of the vision of the Mother answering the seeker's imploring remembrance.

Thus the Chandī has in it a complete epistemology of the experience of the Divine. It propounds the cardinal principle of experimental mysticism.

(b) It is necessary to remark on the distinctiveness and freshness of the Mother-worship propogated in the Chandī. It is singularly free from the involved and esoteric Kundalini Yoga, which forms so large a part of a later tantra. There is not even the faintest allusion to it. Even the Yoga technique formulated by Patanjali is referred to only a little. 'Mahāvratas' elaborated in the Yoga-sūtra are just mentioned once (4 - 9). The Āśrama of Medhas has sublimated even blood-thirsty beasts of the forest into non-violence. This also, perhaps, alludes to Patanjali's proposition that a true Yogi causes the cessation of enmities in his vicinity. In the final devotional practice of the King and merchant, there is considerable conformity to standard yogic practice. But, as for the non-Patanjalian cult of Kundalini Yoga, with its ladder of *cakras*, the coiled up cobra of consciousness and the method of its ascent to Śiva's Sahasrāra, there is no trace of it in the Chandī.

There is another remarkable feature. The Chandī is certainly a glorification of the Divine Mother but there is not a single gross athropomorphic representation of Chandikā. She is a Goddess no doubt and the Mother of Universe. She is fierce in her battles and is also enchantingly beautiful. She captivates by Her enthralling charms all who behold Her, even the enemies in the hour of their fatal combats. She is 'Śthrī Ratna' as Chanda and Muṇḍa report to Sumbha. But the Chandī contains no physical description of the

feminine beauty of the Goddess. Even as Tulasi conveys the boundless beauty of Mother Sita, without drawing attention even once to Her bodily characteristics, the Chandī succeeds in presenting the supreme beauty of the Mother without a single reference to the sexually significant characteristics of Her physical person. In this respect it scores a spiritual victory over the devotional compositions on the Mother such as even Lalitā Sahasra-Nāma, Soundarya-Lahri and Syāmala-Daṇḍaka, which are otherwise of a high order of excellence. The great Ānanda-Vardhana reprimands even mundane poets of the stature of Kālidāsa for treating the love-making of the gods in the crude style of vulgar sex. (Dhvanyāloka, III-6). That the manifestly pious poets on Devī should descend to gross sexual associations in their poetry is more reprehensible. The problem here is crucial. The Divine Mother is a Mother and a concrete personality and reveals Herself in transcendent beauty of form. But in depicting Her form or beauty, the devotee-poet should exclude rigorously the sickly extremes of anthropomorphism. Otherwise, he will blow up his devotion in the orgy of sexual imagary. In achieving this discipline and sanity of representation, the Chandī reaches the highest mark of perfection. This indicates the measure of the spiritual maturity that has gone into its formation. It is in consistency with this that the phala-śrutī of the Chandī has nothing corresponding to the fantastic successes by way of sexual attraction promised in Lalitā-Sahasranāma and Soundarya-Lahari to the worshippers of the Devī (Lalitā-ph. sruti - 42. Soundarya Lahari - 13.)

Sex-motivation is entirely absent in the worship of the Mother promulgated in the Chandī. There is no touch of vāmācāra whatever in our scripture.

(C) The Divine Mother is introduced in the Text as the Mahā Māyā of Viṣṇu. That this description of Hers is no mere religious catholicity but a fundamental doctrine is amply proved by the entire text and particularly in the final adoration where in She is invoked as Nārāyanī. She is the Śakti or power of Viṣṇu in ultimate conception. The fundamental metaphysical principle is named here Viṣṇu or Nārāyana and the philosophy is unequivocally monistic. Māhā Māyā is a power, a creative attribute of the central principle. It is not necessary to labour that this Māyā is not the conventional Advaitic

Māyā, just illusion or the cosmic principle of illusion. Mahāmyā does not pass away on the rising of philosophic enlightenment. There is no विश्वमायानि वृत्ति in the theory of the Chandī. Illusions may cease but She is the power that causes illusions and is also the power that destroys them. In reality Her constructive role as grace that grants enlightenment and even liberation takes effect fully only after the cessation of mundane illusions. She is the eternal splendour of the ultimate principle creatively operative co-existensively with the fundamental being. Her substratum is no Nirviśeṣa vastu from any standpoint that matters. Rather it only appears to be so when the nidrā aspect of Māyā is operative and on its suppression, the constructive aspect of divine Śakti takes the field in all its manifold creativity. This is in radical contrast to the position of Śaṅkara who refuses to concede metaphysical ultimacy to the category of Śakti, as, for instance, in his commentary on the 13th Chapter of the Gītā in explanation of the expression 'Anādi-mat-param Brahma'. The entire philosophy of the Chandī stands or falls with the acceptance or otherwise of the ultimacy of the principle of Śakti as a fundamental character of the ultimate metaphysical principle. Nagoji Bhaṭṭa tries to insert the conventional view by splitting 'gunāśraye guṇa maye' into 'gūṇāśraye' and 'aguna maye'. The expedient is odd and does violence to the rest of the great verse in the hymn. How con she be 'aguna maye' if she is

सृष्टिस्थिति विशानां शक्तिभुते सनातनि ?

She supports the three guṇas of prakriti and is Herself of the essence of the perfections of God-head, which are guṇas in reality and characterise Her in all metaphysical seriousness. This interpretation is ably supported by another consideration. There is no trace in the whole of the Chandī of the philosophical position of Śankarite Advaita. In this it contrasts rather sharply with Lalitā sahasra-nāma and Soundarya-Lahari, which pre-suppose that system very definitely in some major concepts. This circumstance may establish the antiquity of the Chandī but it also clarifies its philosophical identity. The ultimate reality in the system is the one Divine principle characterised inalienably by the category of Śakti.

There is of course the problem of properly formulating the relation of Śakti-man to Śakti. While the negation of Śakti in an ultimate sense

in Brahman is an untenable interpretation of our Śakti, can we take Śakti as a mere attribute, somewhat in the way in which the guṇas are understood in Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika? The guṇas are rather external adjuncts to the substances in that system. It is hard to import that position into our work. In the first place, there is no terminological trace of that system in the Chandī. There is, secondly, no artificial patching of entitiees by the superfluous and untenable samavāya. It is thus not possible to elucidate the relation of Śakti to the substantive entity in terms of this system.

Is it possible to understand Śakti somewhat on the principle of 'Viśesa' propounded in the later Dvaita philosophy? In that school the distinction between substance and its inherent attribute is only a conceptial and verbal device not founded on any distinction in reality. On that hypothesis Śakti will be only a verbal abstraction without any ontological distinctness. There is a difficulty in the account. It has to be examined whether the conventional distinction is bhrānti-mūla or pramāṇasiddha. On the first alternative the position boils down to its historical antithesis, the system of Advaita. On the second, it cannot be distinguished from Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika. Positing of the category of Viśeṣa cannot finally solve the problem and it calls for further investition and determination of the ontological status of the attribute. The Chandī offers another complicating proposition. The Śakti or Mahāmāyā is a full-fledged being or personality, concrete and effectively operating in the scheme of things. It is no abstract feature to be metaphysically discountenanced. It contains the paradoxical nature of being both a power and an entity belonging no doubt to the substantive principle but also exercising the functions of a substance by itself. It has creative agency and can enter into operational relation with its substantive. It bears many forms and is itself a bearer of attributes. This renders the explanation of Śakti on the Dvaita principle of Viśeṣa unworkable. We have to rest content with the thesis that the Supreme being has this fundamental Śakti and the Śakti itself is a personal power of infinite consequence. A position such as this does not abrogate the basic monism, for the Śakti is just an adjectival mode of the one principle. We are witnessing in the Chandī something like an anticipation in principle of either the later Viśiṣṭādvaita or, better still, Acintya-bhedābheda.

(D) The Śakti, or Mahāmāyā performs a remarkable function in relation to the conflict of polytheism and monotheism. The Mahāmyā who destroyed Mahiṣā-sura was the combined mass of the powers of all the dieties such as Viṣṇu, Śiva, and Brahma. The Mother here is no mere aggregate of all gods but an integral entity functioning as a unity. Again when Sumbha accuses Chandikā as glorying in the exploits of other divine fighters, She claims them as Her own vibhutis and withdraws them at once into Her own all-inclusive being. There is unity in God-head without negating the multiplicity of deities. Again the Divine Mother herself breaks up into Kāḷī, Pārvatī, Ambikā as exigencies demand and conducts the campaigns against the demons with an army composed of Her own diverse presentations. Even Her angry breath and rage do take on personal shapes and work in cooperation with Her and under Her command. There is an easy management in all this of the transitions between unity and variety. The faith in one Deity taking on many forms, neither the unity nor variety being a deception, gets conspicuously established in the Chandī. This is a bold solution of one of the major problems of Hindu religious thought. In this handling of the monotheism, there is another agreeable feature in the Chandī. It is absolutely non-sectarian. Chandī is, no doubt Nārāyanī, Viṣnumāyā but She is also the consort of Śiva as indicated in the story of the war against Rakta-bīja. The avatārs of Viṣṇu, Narasimha and Varāha, do play important parts in the fight against Sumbha and Nishumbha. The incarnation of Viṣṇu as Rāma is nowhere referred to. This is a notable silence. Krishna is named once and his foster mother, Yasodha is predicted to give birth to the Mother in a future incarnation of hers, in which she is to kill Sumbha and Nishumbha in their next rebirth. Indra does come in somewhat both as a victim of the aggression of the demons and also as one whose Śakti adds up to the composition of Chandikā. The god Skanda does come in along with him. Surprisingly Ganeśa does not get mentioned. The Mother by Herself is named indifferently as Laxmī, Sarasvatī and Gourī. Narasimhī is well-described in the expression

सटाक्षेपक्षिप्त न क्षत्र संहतिः ।

"The constellations of the stars are scattered by the toss of the mane of the Lion-man Goddess". Thus the believer in every principal god of the Hindu pantheon feels at home in the Chandī. In this catholicity,

it some what anticipates the universal devotionalism of Tulasi Das and Sri Ramakrishna. The breath of Hinduism in its all-embracing vitality is there in the Chandī. If some forms of later Vaiṣṇavism kept away from the religion of Durga, it was partly due to the cult of the Mother identifying itself wholly and illegitimately with exclusive Śaivism. There is no original basis for any fanatical polemic between mother worship and Vaiṣnavism. It is partly due to the Vaiṣnava intolerance of a Goddess who was so universally and equally associated with all the gods. It is interesting to note that even Śaṅkara in an ultra-Vaiṣnavite mood records his depreciation of the Mother-worship in his commentary on the Gītā (9-25-17-4). But in its fundamentals the worship of the Divine mother is non-sectarian and the goddess has intimate links with every important god of Hinduism.

(E) Mahāmāyā is absolute power. The principal modes in which the Divine power actuates itself must be indicated.

(1) In the first place it is the bed-rock of the cosmic process. The entire creation rises out of it, subsists in it and finally dissolves into it. This is the conventional three-fold cosmic activity of god-head. It has to be noted that this omnipotent role is exercised by the Divine Mother universally, in respect of beings that live and of elements and objects that are merely physical. Even the galaxy of gods such as Indra draw support from Her and seek Her merciful intervention when their position is in jeopardy. She is the very principle of dynamism and change as Time.

(2) In relation to finite selves such as we are and the beings whose rescue she accomplishes and whose ends she brings about, there are some special modes of Her activity. She is the life-principle and the power of consciousness actuating them. Whether they pursue good or evil, the strength on their part to do so is derived from Her. She is immanent as power in both the good and the wicked. She is the cause of the delusion of the deluded and the source of light for the enlightened. She binds creatures in Her powerful meshes of Māyā . The Mother imparts strength to the fetters of māyā, so that when the revulsion from the wrong direction of life arises, it must be from the depths of being and that would be possible only if the implications of the initial Asuric choice are gone through in all their throughness. She therefore inheres in sin and destroys it too according to her own wise dispensation.

Whatever is special, meaningful, effective in any creature, bright or dark, is drawn from this source. This is the burden of the Vibhūti-Yoga of the Gītā and that teaching forms the substance of the third mojor hymn of our text.

(3) She is a tremendous destroyer also. In fact that is the aspect of Kālī that strikes the student of the scripture to begin with. She destroys the wicked, specially when they become heinous by seeking to destroy the good. Her mercy and grace, the softer attributes would stand nowhere if they were not sustained and fostered by the irresistible destructive might of the Mother. Power may not be the principal character of the Deity, but without it there is no conservation of values. It requires, as Swami Vivekananda insists and following him Sri Aurobindo, a heroic type of religious spirit to adore the terrible aspect of God. The wars of the Divine Mother in the Chandī are marvellous representations of Divine power.

(4) It is necessary to specify what She destroys. At the time of cosmic dissolution she absorbs the manifested universe into Herself. From a gross point of view, She destroys beings who are evil, in whom the principle of evil is incarnate, such as Mahiṣāsura, Chanda, Muṅḍa, Rakta-bija, Sumbha and Nishumbha. In this aspect, she is too terrific even for contemplation. She also destroys delusion and wordly in fatuations as in the case of Samādhi. Sometimes she Herself inserts delusion as in Madhu and Kaiṭhabha for purposes of finally destroying them. But in relation to the devotees Her role is that of an enlightener and She destroys their ignorance. Even when there is knowledge, a devotee may lack the strength of will and clarity of discrimination. In such a case, She imparts wisdom and moral stamina, and then destroys the weakness of his spirit. There is another aspect of the Mother's destructiveness, uniquely emphasised in our text. When She hurls the evil ones into destruction, what She is actually doing is the destruction of the evil principle in them. They thereby undergo a violent purification. The Mother's violence is an act of mercy to the victims also. This idea is hinted a little in Sri Rama's answer to Vāli in Vālmiki Rāmāyana and is prominently exhibited in the devotional compositions of Vedānta-Deśika. In the Chandī, it forms one of the central elements in its thoery of Divine destructiveness. Chapter 4. (Chapter IV verses 18 to 23)

(5) Now we come to the character of power as grace. In reality all other aspects of power are instromental to grace. Her cosmic activity, Her involvement in the history of creatures, Her destructive power are all for purposes of working out Her grace. They confer uniqueness on grace, as they render it omnipotent. Her motherhood is fundamental. Let us see the various constructive operations of grace. She constitutes the saving wisdom enshrined in the Vedas, Gāyatrī and praṇava. She works the law of Karma, so that the human effort goes to waste. She brings prosperity to the righteous and privation to the unrighteous in accordance with the Law of Karma, which is itself an expression of Her grace. She is the principle of beauty in Herself and all the beauty of nature and human lives are partial manifestations of this infinite beauty. Her beauty has a susaining power and even the wicked demons feeding on it in battle fields, managed to live as long as they could. She sustains the creatures as earth, nourishes them as water and illumines them as the Sun, Moon, and fire. In so far as the elements are friendly to man they are expressions of Her cosmic care· She liberates man from fears, afflictions and calamities just on his remembring Her in the moment of peril. She grants illumination when worshipped with that end. Even those who incur punishment at Her hands, are baptised to sinlessness thereby. Finally She is the great liberator. Mukti, the ultimate goal of life, is Her supreme gift.

The Gītā classifies devotees into four categories, Ārta, Arthārthi, Jijnāsu and Jñāni. The Divine Mother fulfills eminently the aspirations of all the four. She rescues those who are in grief and danger, she confers wordly blessings on utilitatarian devotees. She illumines the souls of the seekers of truth and the enlightened devotees receive from Her the grace of final perfection. The Divine Mother is absolute grace as concretised in Her magnificent personality.

(6) It is remains to add one important clarification. Though She is grace absolute, in power, expansiveness and manifold modes of operation, She functions in response to human initiative. Man must a least turn to Her in remembrance for Her to grant him Her visitation. The manner and direction of grace are determined by the specific prayers of the seekers. Grace operating without human co-operation by way of appeal for it, may take the undesired form it took in relation to the warring demons. If it is to take a positive form it will have to be an

answer to an invocation to that effect. The Mother feeds as and when the children wail for food. There is bliss when the finite will is crowned with fulfilment through the Divine will. When the finite will is not there, grace operates still but not by way of blissful consummation, but by way of purgation which may bear the aspect of brute force for earthly consideration. The Mother's forgiveness may itself take the shape of violence as Tagore would say. "Thy forgiveness bust in storms, throwing them down, scattering their thefts in the dust. Thy forgiveness was in the thunder-stone; in the shower of blood, in the angry red of the sunset". (Fruit gathering-36). The ancient problem of suffering in a universe governed by grace is solved in substance in this account. The sufferings of the wicked are explained that way. The sufferings of the just are due to their not yet turning to the Mother for relief and redress, and thus converting their goodness into godliness. The gods suffer till they come unto the Mother. She swings into action at the very moment of their remembrance of her. The one residual problem of evil is the triumph of the unjust. Their day of reckoning is on its way and they will receive the corrective treatment inevitably. Till then they are bound with the fetters of their own making no doubt but strong with the strength of the Mother.

There remains the problem of evil-doing. The Mother endows the creature with freedom for going that way. She does not leave it in the dark. She offers knowledge of right and wrong through Her revelations. She in fact sent Śiva Himself to the demons with proposals for peace. If that knowledge is powerless to produce wisdom and the power of right resolve in the creature, it is proof that Mahāmāyā in Her tāmasic aspect is at work; that can be subdued only by the devout recollection of the Mother. So if sin is perpetrated, Māyā is to be taken as behind it and the only remedy is the remembrance of the Mother. In short, the basic cause of moral evil is lack of devotion to the Mother. Even so is suffering as noted already. It is the Mother's way of purifying the evil minded. Putting the two together, the solution to the problem of evil is that the ignoring of the Mother is the cause of evil. As the Upaniṣads would have said there has been a Nirākarana of the Divine and hence evil befalls the creature in an answering Niākarana. The initiative and responsibility for evil must be squarely located in the individual. Man is putting up a fight

against the onrush of Divine grace. Hence the fundamental prayers of the Chandī are acts of adoration and surrender. In the establishment of the right relation to Her, lies the solution for the problem of evil. Evil in both its aspects of sin and suffering is life-negation arising from god-negation. As the Upaniṣads would say, the affirmation of the Divine is the sole pathway to life-accomplishment. *Theoretically, the solution to the problem of evil lies in the god-denying egoism of the creature. Practically, the solution lies in the self-erasing devotion to the Divine Mother.* The Mother is all in all but She functions in response to human initiative by way of negation or affirmation and that autonomy of initiative is also Her primordial gift. She is indeed चैतन्य स्तन्य दायिनि

I am unable to discern in the Chandī — I rejoice over this inability — a final message other then that of a call to total surrender to the Divine Mother. She is to be approached with the reverberating chant नमस्तस्यै नमस्तस्यै समस्तस्यै नमो नमः This message necessarily implies the reality and noumenal ultimacy of grace. Man may be redeemed from the illusions of Samsāra, the illusion of the absolute reality of the external world and that of the separate reality of his individual existence. But the grace, whose suspension was the cause of those manifold illusions and whose release into operation effectuates his redemption is no illusion. On the contrary, it is the reality of realities, *Satyasya Satyam.* This undoubtelly constitutes the first and last truth of Śri Chandī.